

# About continuing to worship (with joy!) safely

## Guidance for the ELCE

**Version 12, Issued 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2021:** This revised guidance has been prepared by the Executive Council based on guidelines published by the British and devolved governments, particularly in light of Step 4 in England, Level 0 in Scotland and Alert Level 1 in Wales.

Hello!

With the major easing of government restrictions, we still need to consider how to conduct all our activities, particularly public worship, in a safe environment. With the lifting of legal requirements, the responsibility for this falls to the congregations and the following advice is given to provide guidance. Congregations should consult with their members to determine the comfort level and agree the practices that facilitate a feeling of safety. It is important to consider that others may wish to take a more cautious approach as we open up. We should all be considerate of this and provide the opportunity and space for others to reduce close contacts if they wish.

The current situation in England is that the legal restrictions have been lifted but, as the C-19 cases continue to rise, we are encouraged to act in ways that promote safety amongst all. The government guidance states, “In situations where there is a higher risk of catching or passing on COVID-19, you should be particularly careful to follow the guidance on keeping yourself and others safe as we return to normality.”

In Scotland, there is no change to past requirements at the moment, with the possible exception of physical distancing moving to 1 metre between people from different households.

Wales is still at Level 1, which means there is no change to past requirements, including the requirement for 2 metre distancing.

In all regions, government guidelines are increasing the emphasis on personal responsibility in relation to COVID-19 safety, but we must ensure that we provide an environment that allows people to remain COVID secure.

What follows in this document is ELCE guidance regarding public worship, for all ELCE congregations irrespective of location and charity status.

Region	England	Scotland	Wales
<b>Document Links</b>	<p>July 22:  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do">https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do</a>;</p> <p>July 16:  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship">https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship</a></p>	<p>July 19:  <a href="https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-protection-levels/">https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-protection-levels/</a></p>	<p>July 17:  <a href="https://gov.wales/current-restrictions">https://gov.wales/current-restrictions</a>; July 8:  <a href="https://gov.wales/guidance-reopening-places-worship-coronavirus-html#section-44811">https://gov.wales/guidance-reopening-places-worship-coronavirus-html#section-44811</a></p>
<b>Masks</b>	Not required by law, but ELCE recommends wearing of masks at least for congregational singing.	Still required for worship leaders and congregants	Still required for worship leaders and congregants
<b>Distancing</b>	Please be sensitive to the concerns of others and, for now, maintain a safe distance.	1 meter between households	2 meters between members

<b>Region</b>	<b>England</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>Wales</b>
<b>Singing, chanting, instruments etc</b>	Must be carried out in a way that is safe for your congregation, noting size of worship space, number of people and ventilation.	Full risk assessment and mitigation required	Full risk assessment and mitigation required. 1 meter distance between all singers.
<b>Track and trace / Test and protect / Test, trace and protect</b>	While not required by law, it is good to keep track of attendance.	No change to current practice	Not compulsory but strongly recommend collecting contact information from each person on the premises and storing it for 21 days
<b>Post-service Sociability</b>	After service refreshments may be served in ways that maintain safety for all present (e.g. collect from a serving hatch, avoid sharing cutlery, dishes etc.)	No change to current practice	No fellowship, please leave after the service as quickly as possible
<b>Offerings</b>	While all methods are possible, we recommend that your current practice be maintained.	No change to current practice	No change to current practice
<b>Holy Communion</b>	We may use the chalice, but please be sensitive to the concerns of others recognising that we are still susceptible to an air-borne virus, which means you may continue your current practice. For now, clergy should continue to wear masks for the Service of the Sacrament and sanitise the hands before this part of the service.	No change to current practice	No change to current practice
<b>Hymnals, hygiene</b>	Hymnals can be used but should not be shared.	No change to current practice	No change to current practice
<b>Kneeling, pew cushions</b>	Pew cushions may be used in the pews but not shared. Communicants should stand when receiving communion at the altar rail, and avoid kneeling.	No change to current practice	No change to current practice
<b>Cleaning</b>	Advice is still to maintain rigorous standards of cleaning; it should be the users' responsibility to clean before use (e.g. include in rental agreements)	No change to current practice	No change to current practice
<b>Self-tests</b>	Clergy should test regularly during the week and definitely before a Sunday service.	Clergy should test regularly during the week and definitely before a Sunday service.	Clergy should test regularly during the week and definitely before a Sunday service.
<b>Bible Study, Sunday School, ladies' fellowship and other activities</b>	May take place in ways that maintain safety for all present	No change to current practice	No change to current practice

Region	England	Scotland	Wales
<b>Weddings, Baptisms, Funerals</b>	May take place in ways that maintain safety for all present	No change to current practice	No change to current practice
<b>Signage</b>	To be modified for the new situation, use is still encouraged	No change to current practice	No change to current practice
<b>Hand Sanitisers</b>	Continue to provide hand sanitisers at many points	No change to current practice	No change to current practice
<b>Ventilation</b>	We recommend that doors and windows remain open. Adequate ventilation is important as it has been shown to reduce transmission of the virus.	No change to current practice	No change to current practice
<b>Movement &amp; Seating</b>	No restriction on movement between standing and sitting, but conduct service in ways that maintain safety for all present.	No change to current practice	No change to current practice

**Please note that the COVID-19 risk assessment is to be completed if you make substantial changes to your current practice.** Failure to complete a COVID-19 risk assessment constitutes a breach of Health & Safety legislation, as could having a risk assessment with insufficient measures set out. Places of worship are encouraged to make their risk assessments available online where possible.

The guidelines for Safe Use of Places of Worship have been published for **England** and were updated on **July 22** <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do> and **July 16** <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship> and for **Scotland**, updated on **July 19** <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-protection-levels/> and for **Wales**, updated on **July 17** <https://gov.wales/current-restrictions> and on **July 8** <https://gov.wales/guidance-reopening-places-worship-coronavirus-html#section-44811>

All ELCE congregations should continue to be proactive in any and all actions to mitigate the C-19 transmission rate and need to remind all members with any symptoms that they are to stay at home. All ELCE congregations also need to assure those who are vulnerable, those who are shielding, and those who have any concerns about the spread of COVID-19 that they should stay at home and be supported by whatever online or postal provision exists.

ELCE Executive Council, **22<sup>nd</sup> July 2021**

## Other Points to Note

### Singing

- 1) In Wales, congregational singing and the playing of instruments that are blown into can take place where a risk assessment and appropriate mitigations have been put in place, but both governments emphasis extreme caution in doing this, especially for large groups indoors. Please study the guidelines carefully to ensure compliance. (<https://gov.wales/guidance-reopening-places-worship-coronavirus-html#section-44811>), updated 8 July.
- 2) In Scotland, congregational singing and the playing of instruments that are blown into can take place where a risk assessment and appropriate mitigations have been put in place, but both governments emphasis extreme caution in doing this, especially for large groups indoors. Please study the guidelines

carefully to ensure compliance, noting particularly that whether or not congregational singing is allowed is determined by the level of the area in which the congregation is located.

(<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/pages/individual-and-congregational-worship/#singing>) updated 16 July.

#### **Renting to other groups**

- 3) If you are renting to other groups, you should have a signed agreement with each renter regarding their responsibilities for complying with this guidance and observing all local and national government regulations.
- 4) Where your building is used by other user groups, only those activities permitted by law should take place.

#### **Dealing with Positive COVID-19 Test results among congregants**

- 5) Congregants should be informed that if anyone tests positive for COVID-19 they should inform the pastor immediately. Congregations then use their track and trace list to inform anyone who has attended within the past 14 days that an individual has tested positive. The name of the COVID-19 positive person is only to be shared with the congregation with the permission of the COVID-19 positive person. Reasons for sharing the name (with permission) are so that others can assess their proximity and also pray for the person.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance> (Updated July 19)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person> (Updated July 19)

#### **Anything we have missed?**

- 6) Please contact the Secretary of the Executive Council if you encounter a situation not covered by these guidelines, or if the guidelines are not clear.